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Towards A Christian Strategy In East Asia

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TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN STRATEGY IN EAST ASIA

I am deeply grateful for this opportunity of sharing with the Committee of Reference and Counsel some reflections on my recent ecumenical journey. I am sensible of the privilege which has been mine in making such a journey at such a time. I am no less aware of the responsibility of interpretation.

The last few months have been for me a profound and stimulating experience for which I cannot be sufficiently thankful. But they were a very crowded experience. I traveled continuously for almost sixteen weeks. During that period, I visited Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Malaya very briefly, Thailand, Hong Kong, the Philippine Islands, Korea, and Japan. For six weeks I traveled in the company of my friend and colleague, Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. We went through a large part of Asia like a pair of ecumenical Siamese twins. I should like to say at this point how immensely valuable it was that the two of us representing these two world organizations should have been able to travel together for such a prolonged period and over such a considerable area of Eastern Asia. Our physical presence as a team demonstrated, in a way that no writing or talking could, the identity of purpose, the unity of aim, and the interdependence of the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council. The value of this joint ecumenical pilgrimage was beyond calculation.

Though I have spent the greater part of my adult life in Asia, I had never before been east of Calcutta. Most of the territory that I covered was, therefore, new to me. My Asiatic experience was not without its value, if only as a reminder that you cannot get inside the mind of an Asiatic country by spending a week end in a capital city. Nor do you always get a true picture of the state of the Church by discussions with the kind of ecclesiastical élite who attend ecumenical conferences. There is, inevitably, some superficiality about many of the contacts and experiences of such a journey as this. Perhaps the most impor-

tant qualification for an ecumenical traveler is that he should be aware of these limitations.

One returns from such travel with vivid and multitudinous impressions. Unless these are set within a clear-cut framework of ideas, a report upon them may easily degenerate into a shapeless travelogue or a series of anecdotes. In sharing with you some thoughts upon the Christian future in Eastern Asia, I shall try to do so within a framework of four leading ideas: the complex background; the Christian task; the missionary imperative; and the ecumenical challenge in contemporary Asia.

I. *AN ASIAN PALIMPSEST*. First of all, a word about the general background. There is a constant temptation to those of us who live in the West and read the literature of the West to project our own conceptions into the life of Asia and thereby to distort and misinterpret the Asiatic picture today. It is impossible to understand what is going on in Asia without some sense of history. That is as necessary as an awareness of the contemporary revolution.

Many of you will remember that in 1943 Mr. Wendell Willkie, after his defeat by Franklin Roosevelt in the presidential election, made a world tour. Later, he wrote a book which had a phenomenal success. It was a book that dealt largely with Asiatic conditions. It was entitled *One World*. Its theme was simple. It was built around two main ideas: one, that the advance of science, the development of communications, the economic interdependence of the nations, demanded that we should have one world. We are all familiar with that notion. It is so much a part of the stock in trade of contemporary orators and writers that we are all a little tired of it.

But Mr. Willkie's second thought was that the way to get one world is to give full rein to the universal impulse toward self-determination. If only the surging nationalism of the Asian nations were given free rein, then all Asia and the rest of the world would be welded into a beautiful, brotherly unity.

Well, we know that the history of the last five or six years has not borne out Mr. Wendell Willkie's interpretation of the situation. The fact is that we cannot begin to understand the oriental pattern unless we see it in some sort of historical perspective. It is not enough to begin with the assumption that all

historically important things date from the Declaration of Independence or started at the point where English history books begin – Julius Caesar's invasion of England! A great many things in Asia that are still influencing the life of that great Continent happened before the history of most of our western countries began to be written.

There is no doubt that Asia, on the surface, has become more obviously one than ever before. When you find yourself in the city of Bangkok, you can travel in a few hours to almost any point on the Asiatic continent. But it is well to remember that the real divisions between men are not those of space and time. The things that really divide men are deep rooted in history and culture and religion. You do not, therefore, eliminate these divisions and differences merely by the elimination of distance and the ending of isolation.

If men are divided, they are divided by ideas that are antithetical. One result of the shrinkage of the world is not the resolution of those divisions, but their accentuation. When people are brought together into closer contact and more intimate intercourse than ever before, they become more, and not less, aware of differences in the realm of ideas and values.

That has happened in our world. It is the tragic paradox of our time that while the world has become a unity, mankind is unready for this high destiny. This is true of Asia.

I remember years ago having a question thrown at me in a *viva voce* examination: "Mr. Ranson, what is a palimpsest?" Fortunately, I knew the answer. A palimpsest, as you all know, is a manuscript from which the original writing has been partially erased, to make room for one or more successive pieces of writing. Thus, from the same piece of vellum, you can decipher the writing of different periods. In Asia today we are confronted with an oriental palimpsest, upon which the writing of earlier periods is still clearly visible.

The Asiatic palimpsest contains many layers of influence which together form a variegated and often contradictory pattern. There is no simple clue to the pattern, and it can be understood only if we try to see it in some sort of historical perspective.

Asia has been the birthplace of most of the great religions

of the world, including the faith by which we ourselves are held. It is a superficial illusion to imagine that the power of the ancient ethnic religions is at an end. In more than one country, the ancient religious traditions are finding new life within the free and independent nations that have been born in Asia in recent years.

Then, I think, we have to remind ourselves that Asia has been, and still is, the home of some of the most ancient and elevated civilizations that the world has known. These still leave their imprint upon the thought and, may I say, upon the pride of some of our Asiatic friends as they look toward the West.

Thirdly, Asia has been, and still is, the scene of some of the most enduring and resilient social organizations that the world has ever seen. I will only mention, by way of illustration, the phenomenon of the caste system in India, a social structure which has endured not merely for centuries but for millenia and a socal structure which exemplifies in somewhat exaggerated form a pattern which is not unfamiliar in other parts of Asia.

The typical Asian social structure is in its essentials really very simple. The vast bulk of the population is largely agricultural and often desperately poor, while a tiny and often fantastically wealthy ruling class is found at the top. Whatever gradations you may find within that broad outline, whatever modifications have been wrought in modern times, it is still the governing social pattern in Asia today.

It has, however, been modified perceptibly by the period of European dominion. During the last four hundred years Asia has been exposed to the influence of Western culture. The Spanish, the Portuguese, the British, the Dutch, the French, and the Americans have all made their impact politically and socially upon the life and development of Asia. But even more pervasive than the outreach of Western imperialism has been the infiltration of Western commerce, which in more recent times has brought Asia into the framework of a world economy, and has thrown up, for the first time in Asia, a middleclass, a *bourgeoisie*. Within the ancient traditions there was no middle class. Its rise is a new social phenomenon. It is a phenomenon which has made possible modern political development in Asia.

During the last decade the continent of Asia has passed through a political experience which has knocked away many of the ancient pillars of its stability. The collapse of Japan's recently developed empire, the Eastern Asia co-prosperity sphere, has done something very much more than to bring Japan herself to ruin. It has dislocated the whole fabric of Eastern Asian trade and thrown the economy of a continent out of gear. The withdrawal of the British from India and Pakistan, and the more recent withdrawal of the Dutch from Indonesia have removed the main linchpins of Western dominion on the continent.

Since the war something like 500 million people have entered into political freedom and at least seven new nations have been born. In their birth, new and powerful forces have been released into the life of Asia which, superimposed upon that historical pattern which I have been outlining so very roughly, are producing an impression not of unity, but of something that looks, at times, like total chaos. One cannot travel through Asia today without being aware, in a quite exhilarating way, that one is witnessing history in the making. But, at the same time, one cannot so travel without feeling a tremendous undercurrent of concern as to what the future of this vast continent, caught up in these new and powerful tides, is going to be.

The most potent forces in the new Asia are only superficially political and economic. The thing that gives them their driving power is that they are not *merely* political and not *merely* economic. They have behind them the driving power of religious passion. I should like to make special reference to two of those forces which meet you almost anywhere you go in Eastern Asia today.

One is the new type of nationalism which is coming to birth within an Asia composed largely of new, independent nations. It is not the nationalism with which I had to live in India for fifteen years. It is nationalism with a difference. And the difference derives from the fact that it is a nationalism which has achieved the goal of self-determination and now finds itself confronted with the very much more difficult and complex problem of building a new and stable society. It is finding that all the Utopian hopes which sustained men when they fought for the simple ideal of the overthrow of Western dominion, have not

been realized. Because of this there is, I think, a tendency within the new nationalism towards religious and cultural self-consciousness and autonomy. This is going to have far-reaching effects in some countries upon the prospects of the Christian Church.

I found this, for example, in India, Pakistan, and Indonesia. Among some of the people actually shaping the policies of those lands there is evidence of a feeling after some kind of spiritual basis that will give to their new nationalism a stability which it at present lacks. There is a feeling that this is not going to be found within the conventional framework of secular ideas. There is, consequently, coming to birth a kind of cultural and religious nationalism that is aggressive and often hostile to the Christian faith.

Mixed up with it there may well be, in some cases, an attempt on the part of the old privileged classes to shore up and defend their positions of privilege. That was very evident in Indonesia, especially in those areas of Indonesia where the old Moslem rulers still wield considerable political influence. One could see at many points an attempt being made by the old Moslem sultans to entrench themselves in political and social power by invoking religious sanctions and by rallying the people to an aggressive Moslem loyalty.

The second great force in contemporary Asia is the social revolution which is sweeping across every Asian country. I should like to make it quite clear that what is happening is not something that has been prompted by Communist propaganda. It is something that is inherent in the historical development of Asia during the past twenty or thirty years, and particularly in the fact that so many countries in Asia have in the last five years achieved political freedom. The lid of the boiling social cauldron has been lifted off.

The oppressed masses, who within the old social tradition were denied elementary justice, are now claiming that justice from society. There is an almost universal social revolution. The Marxist ideology is not a primary source of it. But it is at work seeking to lay hold of the revolution and to pervert it to its own purposes.

It is important that we should remember that the real driv-

ing forces in the life of Asia today are essentially religious forces. The new nationalism and the new communism may seek secular ends, but they are inspired by a fervor which is religious. It is because of this that their influence is being felt in every part of Asia today.

II: *THE CHRISTIAN TASK.* In the midst of this Asiatic ferment the task of the Church is of crucial significance. Amongst the new forces which are making themselves felt in the life of the Asian continent today is the Christian Church. The revolutionary power of the Christian Gospel must be set alongside religious nationalism and militant communism as one of the factors in the contemporary Asian revolution. The Church is a tiny minority but if we omit it, the total picture in Asia cannot be clearly seen or rightly understood.

I should like to put what I have to say about the Christian task in Asia within the context of some comments about the Bangkok Conference. I believe that it was in the providence of God that at this moment in Asian history it became possible for the representatives of the Christian Churches in Eastern Asia, to meet together at Bangkok. The more I reflect upon that meeting the more deeply convinced I am of its providential timing.

The conference was significant not only because of its historical setting but because of its representative character. For the first time in the history of the ecumenical movement a regional group in Eastern Asia met together to look at the Christian task *continentally.* That in itself is a matter of some significance. The people who attended the Bangkok Conference were the officially delegated representatives of the National Christian Councils and the member churches of the World Council of Churches in the region. There was, unfortunately, one major gap in the representation. There was no Chinese delegation. The Chinese delegates were appointed and made their arrangements to travel but were finally blocked because of technical difficulties regarding visas and passports. We were fortunate in having present Dr. S. C. Leung, the Executive Secretary of the Conference, who is also a distinguished and representative Chinese churchman. Upon his shoulders was laid the responsibility for interpreting the present position of the Christian Church in China.

Bangkok was significant most of all in what it symbolized. In the midst of an Asia that is increasingly conscious of its division, it symbolized a new sense of Christian solidarity. It has sometimes been remarked that in the countries of the West, Christian people are held together by a common cultural tradition and that their main ecumenical task is to overcome divisions within the Christian fellowship. But in East Asia there is no common cultural tradition, and the only thing that holds Christian Asians together in a living solidarity is the fellowship of the Christian Church.

That was demonstrated very vividly at Bangkok. We gave a great deal of time at the conference to the discussion of the cultural heritage of Eastern Asia—only to discover that the conference was not able to say anything very positive. The conference quickly became aware that there is no such thing as a cultural heritage of East Asia, that what we face in Asia is a plurality of cultures, and that those cultures are now more conscious of difference than of community. The commission that set out to prepare findings on the cultural heritage of Eastern Asia ended up by bringing in a report on the proclamation of the Gospel in Eastern Asia. The emphasis was thus placed upon the thing that alone unites Christian Asians, despite their differences of culture, language, tradition and outlook.

Finally the conference was significant because of what it said and did. I do not think that it made any very sensational pronouncements. But I think that it laid the emphasis in the Christian task in Asia at a point that has a very distinct bearing upon the whole future of missionary policy. The Bangkok Conference, above all else, called the churches of Eastern Asia, and their partners in the West, back to the essentials of the Christian task: to the proclamation of the great central facts of the Faith and to the development of the churches in Asia as witnessing Christian communities.

Now, those things seem so simple as to be almost platitudinous. But if you get down to an analysis of some of the most challenging issues which confront the Church today, you will find that it is in the assertion of the central theological truths that the Christian Church in Asia has to speak its most vital and relevant word. I can develop that by a reference to communism.

The point at which communism is most vulnerable—and this came out very clearly in the discussion in Bangkok—is in its bad theology. The conference was very careful to make that distinction, which I have already emphasized, between the social revolution which is sweeping across Asia and the Marxist ideology which seeks to take hold of and pervert it. The conference, in effect, said to the Christians of East Asia: Do not confuse the issues and allow yourselves to be maneuvered into a position in which you resist a legitimate revolution which seeks real social justice.

There was no disposition in Bangkok to say: We can beat communism by talking and behaving as if the Church exercised political and economic power. That is a naive illusion. The Church cannot meet the challenge of communism by trying to do the job of the governments better than they are doing it themselves. Bangkok was critical of that approach. The conference said, in effect: The only way in which Christianity can meet the communist challenge is to be faithful to the heritage it has received in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Why? Because communism is itself a religion. It is, as William Temple once said, a Christian heresy. It cannot be rightly understood unless we remember that Karl Marx was a Jew and that he transplanted into his social theory many of the Judaistic concepts in which he was brought up: For a chosen people he substituted a chosen class; for a personal messiah, a messianic proletariat; for the Judaistic eschatology, the Marxian conception of the class war and the end of history in the triumph of the messianic proletariat.

Marx subconsciously retained and transmuted into his social conceptions the religious ideas and some of the religious passion which he had inherited. Marxism, in Asia or anywhere else, can be understood only in terms that are theological, as well as social and historical. Marxism worships its own particular god. It worships an historical process. And because its god is within history it knows no absolute ethic; it knows no absolute values; it knows no standards by which history itself can be judged. Marxism knows only a situational ethic, a tactical ethic: That is right which at any given time advances the historical process. That is wrong which retards it. Marxism knows no

standard of reference outside the historical process. It therefore knows no absolute ethic. It lives in a moral relativism which, in the last resort, defeats its own purpose, because it subordinates the rights of the individual to the worship of an abstraction—the historical process.

Now, the answer to that is not in social theory. The answer is not even in the declaration of moral absolutes, because the Christian God does not speak in moral absolutes. The answer to Marxism, the ultimate Christian answer, is a theological one. It is a proclamation of the truth that the world has a Lord, a Judge, and a Savior, Jesus Christ, and that only in the acknowledgement of that Lord, who stands outside and judges history, can human rights ultimately be safeguarded and human justice ultimately be achieved.

I think the Bangkok Conference saw that very clearly. It was because it saw it clearly that there was such a tremendous emphasis upon the necessity for theological recovery and a revival of evangelism within the Church. East Asia needs an evangelism rooted in theological renewal, but an evangelism which concerns itself with contemporary social and political problems and sees them in their theological context.

Communism is not only a challenge to theology; it is a threat to religious liberty. It is not the only threat to religious liberty. One of the things that concerned us at Bangkok was the fact that, in practically every country in Asia today, there are signs that religious freedom is in danger. In some countries there may not in the future be an opportunity for the open proclamation of the Word in the ways to which we have become accustomed. There may be something like a blackout of religious liberty over considerable areas of Asia.

Let me say in parenthesis that I think it premature to offer any judgment as to what is going to happen in China. When I was in Hong Kong I met about fifty missionaries there, many of whom had recently come from various parts of China. After listening to their discussion for two hours, I came to the conclusion that it was premature to form a conclusion, either as to what is going on in China or what the policy of the Peoples' Government toward religious freedom, toward missionary activity, and toward the witness and worship of the indigenous

Chinese Church is going to be. There is no evidence of a coherent or consistent policy as yet.

There is, however, evidence both in China and in other parts of Asia of increasing restraint upon Christian liberty. One of the curiosities of the Asian situation is this: that there is in the life of many countries a deep contradiction. Most of these newborn nations are anxious to appear in the eyes of the world community as good and enlightened democratic states. Most of them are, therefore, saying: We subscribe to the Declaration of Human Rights as enunciated by the United Nations. Many of them are busy writing bits of the declaration into their constitutions. But at the very moment at which that is happening, and within many of the countries in which it is happening, you find cultural and religious nationalism increasing its power and steadily encroaching upon Christian freedom.

The point at which it is going to make itself felt most immediately and obviously is in our educational institutions. In India and Pakistan I think we are certainly going to be confronted with a situation in which we shall have to ask ourselves whether we are justified in carrying on a vast educational system within which it is virtually impossible to teach effectively the Christian religion, and in which we may be obliged to teach non-Christian dogmas. I believe that we ought to face the implications of the growing threat to religious freedom before we are forced by circumstances hastily to improvise a new policy.

What is the ultimate answer to the threat to religious liberty? The ultimate answer is a witnessing Christian Church. That, at least, is what Bangkok said. Obvious—platitudinous, if you like—but how profoundly true and how urgently it needs saying in Asia and elsewhere. One of the things that struck me almost everywhere I went amongst the churches in Asia is that many of those churches are heavily professionalized. There is a dangerous and heretical form of clericalism which regards the task of preaching the Gospel and spreading the Word as the prerogative of the paid and full-time ministry of the Church. A professionalized church will not stand in the day of trial. The only kind of church that will be able to resist the pressures of social sentiment or political action is a church in which every member is a witness to his faith in Christ. We need a new and vivid apprehen-

sion of that truth. We need a revival of lay activity that will carry the message of the Gospel out onto the frontiers where men do their jobs, in contact with the realities of modern society and of the contemporary world. Bangkok called the Church back to that kind of emphasis.

Where the Church in Asia has been faithful to the conception of the Church as a worshipping and witnessing community, there the Church has grown. It is not without significance that the great community movements in India, which have brought so many people into the Church in recent decades, have for the most part been movements of lay witness. Quite ordinary, humble, village people told their own relations and their own families about this new thing of which they had heard. Thus the World spread along the lines of caste and family relationship until whole communities were asking for Christian instruction. The spearhead of the community movement in India was lay witness.

In the great Batak Church in northern Sumatra, a church which has not had a missionary since the internment of the Rhenish missionaries in 1940, has, during these ten years, added something like 150,000 people to its total membership. Yet the Church in Batakland has only one ordained minister for every 6,000 members. I was interested, by contrast, to discover that the Church in Japan has one ordained minister for rather less than 100 members. You cannot draw valid comparisons on the sole basis of figures of this kind. What I am concerned to emphasize here is that the growth of the Batak Church was possible because it recognized the numerical weakness of the ordained ministry and deliberately trained its laity in Christian witness. Despite all the difficulties which it faces at this time, the Batak Church has enormous vitality. Its power of survival and its power of growth have been due to the fact that it is a witnessing, as well as a worshiping community.

III: *THE MISSIONARY IMPERATIVE AND THE ECUMENICAL CHALLENGE.* The Christian Church in Asia is a tiny minority community set in the midst of a vast, largely unsympathetic, and often hostile, population. It is estimated that there are something like 1,160 million people in the countries represented at the Bangkok Conference. It was similarly esti-

mated that the non-Roman churches represented at the conference had a combined membership of something like 16 million. One has only to mention these figures to put the unfinished Christian task in its true perspective. There were no illusions at Bangkok about its magnitude. There was, on the contrary, a very vivid awareness that unless the churches are faithful to that which has been committed to them and become in reality witnessing communities, they cannot hope to stand amidst the pressures and threats that surround them. There was an equally ardent desire for some new expression of Asian Christian unity. So it was that there grew out of Bangkok a powerful sense both of missionary urgency and of ecumenical challenge. The conference, with complete unanimity, asked that the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council should appoint an ecumenical ambassador in Eastern Asia. It asked, not for an administrative officer who would set up a regional organization, but for a man who would symbolize the sense of Christian solidarity which was so vividly present at Bangkok.

They said: We do not want an office *wallah*; we want a man who will come and speak with a prophetic voice, who will interpret what is happening in the total Asiatic scene, who will help us grow together in that Christan unity and common purpose which we have here discovered.

The missionary task in Asia today confronts us with an ecumenical challenge which is not being met. One of the things that distressed me as I went about from country to country was that there is evidence on every hand of a heightened sense of denominationalism. In these post-war years, there has been a quite unprecedented projection of Western sectarianism into most of the lands of Eastern Asia.

In Japan it is estimated that the membership of the National Christian Council includes 95 per cent of the indigenous membership of the non-Roman Catholic Churches; but only 50 per cent of the total number of non-Roman Catholic missionaries are associated with the National Christian Council. This means that 50 per cent of the Protestant missionary forces in Japan are right outside any kind of ecumenical influence and are in danger of building up a tradition of sectarianism that may thrust us back to the pre-ecumenical era.

What is true of Japan is true of almost all the countries in Asia. It is not the whole truth. There are some indications of ecumenical retrogression which might be laid at the feet of the missionary agencies of the great denominations. Some of the things which I saw confirmed my conviction that the main problem lies not with the indigenous church, but with the so-called sending countries and with the missionary societies.

I shall not elaborate that, because my time is far spent. But I will say this: The missionary imperative—and it is an imperative of tremendous force everywhere in East Asia today—issues ultimately in an ecumenical challenge from which there is no escape. The ecumenical idea grew out of the missionary movement, and if the ecumenical idea becomes divorced from the missionary impulse, it will become sterile. It is when we take the missionary imperative seriously that we see the ecumenical challenge most clearly.

Wasn't it Henry Drummond who said after he visited China in the 1880's, "The missions in China move not like a mighty army, but like a band of unorganized guerrillas"?

It was that sense of the need for cutting out guerrilla warfare if the Gospel was to be brought to the people that gave birth to the ecumenical movement. Only when we recover a terrific sense of missionary urgency will we begin to get together in effective ecumenical planning. The ecumenical movement must become a strategy of world evangelism. Unless it becomes that, it is just an academic exercise. All of us who are in this room pay lip service to it. I think the time has come when we must look afresh at its implications and face the new ecumenical challenge with far greater resolution than we are displaying at the present moment.

There is a danger of denominational division freezing within the framework of the National Christian Councils. I think that in Eastern Asia we need to look once more at the nature of our total structure. There is a danger of a sort of functional autonomy developing within the Younger Churches. This derives most frequently from the operations of the mission boards. We get our institutional work divorced from the life of the Church. It is related more directly to our missionary organization than it is to the life of the indigenous Church. The result is a danger-

ous dichotomy. In more than one country I found myself asking the question: Are we not overinstitutionalized? In this new and fluid situation in which the Church finds itself, may we not need to be a great deal more footloose than we are, to get rid of some of the enormous overhead of institutions? The evangelistic purpose of some of our institutions is not always crystal clear. It may be that in certain countries we may have to function without this great immobile organization which grew up in a more stable era. One of the tragedies of the whole situation is that so often in this business of functional autonomy, denominationalism, institutionalism, we have reared a "generation of oriental Christians who delight to go to Hell in an occidental way."

There is one more thing I want to say about the ecumenical challenge. Time and again as I went about through the different countries I was moved to thank God for the wisdom of the men who founded the International Missionary Council, and for the soundness of the principle upon which they based the whole organization. Those ecumenical pioneers saw clearly that if you are to make the ecumenical idea effective you must express it locally. They therefore based the International Missionary Council upon national and regional councils as the effective spearheads of ecumenical action.

The idea of national or regional ecumenical action is not merely a useful administrative expedient. It embodies a basic theological principle. When God himself wanted to redeem a world he did not write the message of redemption in letters of fire across the heavens that all mankind could read it at once. He sent His only begotten Son at a given point in time, to a given place on the earth's surface. He sent Him, indeed, to an obscure little country that played no great part in the great affairs of the nations. In the Christian doctrine of incarnation there is a truth that the ecumenical movement must learn if it is to become actual. The ecumenical idea to become real must become incarnate in every local situation. That, alas, is not happening with the power and the effectiveness with which it ought to happen.

In country after country—in Indonesia, in the Philippines, in Korea, in Japan—I could describe to you, if there were time, situations to which only an effective National Christian Council can

address itself. Yet for the most part we have been starving the National Christian Councils. We have been thinking of them as something over above and sometimes over against our own work.

The ecumenical challenge of Eastern Asia is a challenge that must be faced within the Foreign Missions Conference in quite concrete terms. It must be faced within a wider sphere than the Foreign Missions Conference. Somehow or other we have to bring home to the whole Christian constituency in the churches of the West the truth that the ecumenical movement has reality and meaning only as it becomes a strategy by which the Gospel is being brought to the whole world.

We cannot, in facing the kind of situation that confronts the churches in Asia today, escape that Word of our Lord which haunted me again and again as I went about throughout these lands: "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one, even as Thou, Father, art in me and I in Thee, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that Thou didst send me . . . that they may be one even as we are one."

There is nothing that Asia needs more today than that word of faith, and there is no way that it can be brought effectively to a needy and divided continent save through a Church that learns the answer to its own lost unity in a deepened ecumenical fellowship born of quickened missionary concern.

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Mr. Ranson's address was followed by a discussion period. Questions and answers are given below:

QUESTION: I should like Mr. Ranson to tell us how he would interpret the rise of this cultural and religious nationalism as over against the attitudes of people that obtained at the Bangkok Conference of disregard of nationalism. How does he explain the tendency at Bangkok to turn away from considerations of the background cultures of the people who were there as over against the revival of cultural nationalism?

MR. RANSON: It is true that Bangkok showed an extraordinary lack of interest in this question of the interpretation of the Gospel in relation to the background of Eastern Asian culture. I think there are two reasons that are worth mentioning.

One is that the demand from within the Christian Church for an oriental expression of Christianity, which was so vocal at Tambaram, was really a projection into the life of the Church of a national sentiment which was very strong and aggressive ten or twelve years ago but which has been satisfied now in most Asiatic countries by their independence. In other words, the attitudes expressed at Tambaram were partially political and not strictly theological.

Second, many of those who made the demand ten or twelve years ago for an oriental expression of Christianity were to some extent influenced by a syncretistic approach to Christianity. That was certainly true in India. I think the work of Hendrik Kraemer on the "Christian Message in a Non-Christian World," which was the subject of so much controversy, has had a profound influence on that situation. While few younger churchmen would go the whole way with Kraemer, a great number of them were awakened by the studies of Kraemer to a new sense of the uniqueness of the Christian Gospel and to the idea of contact through contrast rather than through similarity.

There was at Bangkok an obvious sense of the wonder and the uniqueness of the Christian message. I think those two things go a long way toward explaining the lack of interest in an oriental expression of Christianity at Bangkok.

Now, whether the rising tide of cultural nationalism of which I have spoken will force the churches in the near future to face the issue as, say, Alexandria in the second century had to face it, I do not know. Sooner or later they will have to face the need for an apologetic which is at once loyal to the classical Christian tradition and, at the same time, related to the currents of thought and life in Asia.

QUESTION: My question grows out of the closing sentence of Mr. Ranson's address. He spoke in strong and moving terms to the effect that it was time we stopped talking ecumenical fellowship and began to do something really significant about it. I would like the challenge to go beyond mere preachment. I would like Mr. Ranson to tell us concretely—we would all appreciate it!—what are these steps that he believes we should take toward ecumenical operation.

MR. RANSON: I think that is the kind of question that must be dealt with in terms of the varying local situations. Let me illustrate.

In Indonesia you have a situation in which the Dutch missions which have built up a marvelous tradition of missionary work and, under God, one of the strongest churches in Asia, are not able to carry the load they have hitherto carried, and have turned to the International Missionary Council as the embodiment of the ecumenical movement, and have said, "Can we get an ecumenical approach to the solution of this problem by which a group of churches in other less hard-hit countries will be able to carry on some of the work and thereby ease the burdens we cannot bear alone?"

There is a first-class opportunity for a new ecumenical approach to a given situation which does not require, it seems to me, any vast organization or ecclesiastical adjustments, but a readiness to put an ecumenical responsibility before some of the plans for denominational expansion in new areas or in new directions.

In Japan, it seems to me that we have missed a very great opportunity, and are still missing it, in that we have not succeeded in bringing together all the non-Roman churches in Japan, to sit down and say, "How are we to meet this opportunity together? How are we to plan for the conversion of Japan as a whole, deploying our resources in the most effective way?"

These are rough illustrations. I do not believe you can lay down principles as to how the whole ecumenical movement should operate over the whole world.

In response to a supplementary question, MR. RANSON said, in part: Where you get a church that is overwhelmingly large, over against some smaller denominations, the need for an ecumenical organ is greater, rather than less. When the strength of the churches is evenly balanced, they often find it easier to come together. When you have a situation, as in southern India, where you have the great Church of South India alongside other smaller churches, it is very important to have an effective Christian Council, if only for the good of the soul of the predominant church.

QUESTION: I noticed somewhere that one of the East Asian countries had made arrangements to admit Danish medical missionaries if they in turn would admit medical men or physicians from that country into Denmark. Have you heard anything of such arrangements being made?

MR. RANSON: I have not heard of such action with reference to the *admission* of medical missionaries. In India the

Government will not recognize as registered medical practitioners doctors from countries that do not recognize Indian medical degrees. That has been a major problem in the Vellore Medical College. There is reciprocity within the British Commonwealth. There has been no difficulty between India and Britain or the British Dominions — Canada, Australia, and so on; but there has been difficulty between India and America and India and Denmark, because there has not been reciprocity there.

Hitherto they have simply said: "You cannot become a registered medical practitioner; you can practice, but you cannot be recognized by the Government and you cannot teach in a college affiliated to a recognized university."

QUESTION: In a previous address made here this statement was made: "There is an unprecedented responsiveness and even predisposition on the part of peoples of East Asia to give Christianity a chance."

May I ask, did you find that the East Asians themselves recognized the breakdown of the religions they had been using?

MR. RANSON: I should say that that is a generalization that is not of universal application. I think it is true of certain areas; it is not true of all the areas I visited. I do not think it is true of India on any widespread scale or of Indonesia on any widespread scale. It is, on the other hand, strikingly true of Korea at this moment.

I should not say that there is any universal evidence of people turning to Christianity. On the other hand, I felt that everywhere in Asia the Christian Gospel holds the real key to the situation. It has the answers if it can formulate them. One of the things we have to do is to enable the Church to articulate those answers.

QUESTION: Do you say that of yourself or do you think the Christians themselves say it in India?

MR. RANSON: I think the ablest Christian *leaders* in Asia are seeing it; but you must remember the composition of the Asian Church. It is still largely illiterate in many countries.

QUESTION: Some of us who have had the privilege of seeing Japan in the four postwar years have said extreme things about the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel there and perhaps have overstated the response to the proclamation of the Gospel in comparison with what you saw and heard while there.

MR. RANSON: I agree that there has been a great deal of hyperbole with regard to the Christian opportunity in Japan. I think that some of the Japanese themselves have been rather embarrassed by the large claims that have been made about the Christian opportunity.

There is no doubt at all that there is an opportunity; but it is an opportunity that exists because of the removal of restraints that formerly existed — the disappearance of emperor worship, the dropping of persecutions, the safeguarding of religious freedom — all of which have opened up new possibilities. It is that, I think, which can be seen, rather than any evidence of a positive religious revival.

It is true the churches are full, and that congregations are predominantly young. But, on the other hand, I was told that a lot of people who attend, attend for a Sunday, then drop out, and drift away. There is no doubt that the totally new situation in Japan, which leaves people open to a Christian approach, has given the Church in Japan an opportunity such as it has never had in its history.

What struck me most forcibly was that the Church itself is unready for that opportunity. The Church in Japan, it seems to me, is overclericalized. I think there are almost too many ministers, which is not a thing you can say about most churches in Asia!

I think the Church in Japan is overinstitutionalized and that the institutions are not effectively geared to a strategy of evangelism and related to the life and task of the Church. I believe the Church in Japan is overloaded with machinery. And it is not all made in Japan!

QUESTION: I have a very simple question you can answer easily. I understand you feel that insofar as the Christian Church in Asia is concerned, it is overinstitutionalized. What would you do about it?

MR. RANSON: I should begin by trying to get every Christian Council in Eastern Asia to sit down and look at the central job of the Church and to make a survey of total resources in manpower, in institutions, in everything that they have.

Next I should suggest that they ask themselves, "What are we trying to do, and are all our institutions and activities related to this central end?"

Then I should suggest that the churches and missions begin

ruthlessly to cut out those that are not clearly related to the central purpose of a crusading and missionary Church.

I realize I am begging a lot of questions. I think we have got to think strategically, and we are not doing it. We have far too many missionaries running a kind of three-ring circus. They are often too busy to do, or even see, the things that should be done.

We need a revolution within the missionary movement. But I recognize that it is easier to say that than to do it. It is far easier to start two institutions than it is to stop one! Those of us who have been missionaries know how easy it is to become so involved in administration, so tied up in the overhead of institutional work, that we have not had enough time to give to the primary work to which God had called us — the ministry of Word and sacrament — enough freedom to give the people the pastoral leadership and care they need, nor enough detachment from daily routine to see its relation to a total Christian strategy.